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[00:00:00] **TYREE:** ...what we had done, by April I started thinking seriously about developing a social organization. [inaudible chatter]

Let's start at around—UCWA was actually—we had our first meeting in June 1970, and that was basically a meeting of construction workers who had been involved in—had been plaintiffs in the lawsuit of the United States vs. [Ironworkers] Local 86. I mentioned earlier at about the time around November, when we started up our demonstrations in 1969, the Justice Department came in and filed a lawsuit against the five trade unions, the mechanical trade unions: the electricians, sheet metal, ironworkers, plumbers, and operating engineers. That

lawsuit had been litigated and there was a decision in February, and the lawsuit was to be implemented in June, June 15. So it was about the same time we had the first meeting of the UCWA.

UCWA was at that point was—no, some of had been involved in the earlier CCA demonstrations, and the leadership of the CCA had during written letters to all of the workers who had testified during the course of that hearing. As a result of that, forty-one of them were named in the lawsuit as people that had the right to go to work in the building trades because of their past experience. There were also some other people named who were young people who had applied to get into the apprenticeship program and subsequently testified about the discrimination. So the court had ordered those folks by name to be admitted into the trade unions. So that was the nuclei for pulling together workers. We contacted all of those guys and had a meeting at my house in the middle of June.

[00:03:02] **WILLIAM:** What year?

[00:03:02] **TYREE:** 1970. That first meeting was, in essence, what became UCWA. We talked about what it meant to be named in the lawsuit, and we had one of the lawyers from the Justice Department come in and explain the requirements for the trade union that they had to go along with. We then proceeded to get those guys down to the union hall in the next few days. The union halls at first were not cooperative and resisted. We then started at this point now, a third series of demonstrations.

I'll go back now. First of all, the first series was like in late August or early September 1969. The second series was in November 1969. Now, the third series starts up, and this time the question is that the unions and contractors were refusing to implement the court's order. And the order was basically to let in these forty-one people that the court had named as journeymen, craftsmen in those trades. They also ordered about six or seven apprentices who had testified to be admitted into the apprenticeship program. In addition to that, each trade union was to take in approximately twenty to twenty-five people into the apprenticeship programs annually until a certain amount of people were in the trade unions. And the court would maintain jurisdiction over that lawsuit until those folks were admitted into the trade union and had graduated from the trade union as journeymen. And so that was the basis that we went back on the streets, because they had not implemented that order. And these demonstrations started in mid-July 1970. We closed down about three relatively large construction projects at the University of Washington, the Safeco Building, and Seattle Community College, I think, I'm not sure.

Anyway, before that got started good, after the second day, the judge then ordered everybody into his office that was involved in the lawsuit and took the position that if the courts didn't—if the defendants in the lawsuit and the employers—at that time the unions were the only defendants—did not comply with his order immediately, then he would hold them in contempt of court. And so the employers then took advantage of the situation and said, "Okay, we'll set up in our association offices a dispatch procedure. So the UCWA can send people down here, we in turn will send them to work on our projects." So within the next ten days, we were busy getting people, guys who had been involved in the demonstrations and these young guys from the community to then go to the respective union halls—not the unions halls, but the construction association, and they placed them to work. So we got ninety people to work within a period of ten days, ninety plus that forty-one people who were named in the lawsuit.

In retrospect, the employer here had a situation where his long-range goal was to weaken the trade unions' grip over him by taking in these additional workers, who would eventually become trade union members but would also see that trade unions had not operated in their best interests, so the employers took the first step to apply what the courts ordered. And also these folks were not journeymen, except for the forty-one people. The other

ninety people were apprentices. What that meant was that they had an additional ninety people making less than mechanics' salaries. And then they saw each year an additional ninety. So in effect, what we were talking about was an additional amount of workers coming into the trade unions, which meant that they had a larger supply of workers, and they had a cheaper worker, because it would take those people five years to become journeymen. So even though we didn't realize it, that was in the employers' best interest at the time, but it also was in our best interest.

But in the haze of getting those people to work right away, because we didn't understand why it was important for us to screen and get the person most suited for their work, or the people who had some background in that work. And we did when it was possible, but if we didn't have somebody with experience as an electrician but who was there and willing to go in, we didn't stop them. either. So as a result of that—and I'd say there was probably some amount of resistance on the job, in terms of the foremen and the white workers, but to this day I still can't say there was a tremendous amount of resistance, but there was certainly some.

But some of those workers, very few of them, stuck in there. Out of ninety people, probably fifteen of them stayed in whichever trade they went into. I saw one of the guys this morning, a sheet metal worker named Brown, who went in the initial group and now is a journeyman sheet metal worker. And about fifteen of that ninety, the rest of them, for whatever reasons, dropped out. Some guys went into the service, some guys went to college, and some guys just didn't show back to work after a few weeks. That then became a full time job for those of us who saw ourselves as leadership in UCWA, was to make sure that those people stayed on the job or be replaced whenever they dropped out.

And there was resistance from the trade union leadership at every corner of the way. Many of the [management] leadership were supporting it, trade union leadership was resisting it, and they found numerous ways to keep people out. They had the controls over the dispatch, and so a Black apprentice might be out of work for a period of two or three months, while he is required to go to school. And so this guy sees himself having to go to school twice a week at North Seattle Community College, or somewhere not convenient for him, and of course his position was, "Why should I go to school if I'm not working?" He hadn't stockpiled a bank account or anything, so that was a cause for a lot of the attrition, the inability to work regularly.

So the fact that they could continue to control and manipulate the dispatch, in 1971 we went back into court and tried to get it altered in some fashion, so that we would have some say about the dispatch or to force the unions to dispatch on a fair basis or develop jobs. There was a voluntary ratio of journeymen to apprentices on the job. It could be—in the electricians, for example, they were allowed to have an apprentice for every five journeymen, but oftentimes that was not being complied with. The apprenticeship coordinator was a union man, in most cases, in all these cases, as a matter of fact. Normally the apprenticeship coordinators were working very hard to develop jobs for these apprentices, and as a result of it, we were down in 1972, two years after the initial order was implemented, we were back down to about twenty people inside those trade unions, when we then should have had that forty-one people that were named, plus approximately a hundred for those two years,. So we should have had around 250 people, and we had about twenty.

So we then went back into the streets. So now we're talking about the fourth set of demonstrations that the workers were involved in. This time, it started with the highway I-90 project, and the next day we were at the University of Washington, and the next day downtown Seattle, and it finally came to a loggerhead at Seattle Community College, up on Broadway. The demands that we were putting forward then was that we not only wanted the jobs, we wanted some control over dispatch of those jobs, we wanted to be formally involved in the lawsuit as a partner in the implementation of it. Well of course, that was something that neither the employers nor the unions wanted to go along with. They didn't want to share the authority they had over the control of the

workers, and so that's how we ended up in the streets. And this went on for about a month, about a month of demonstrations and stuff, before the court then finally decided to go back and hear the case and make some changes.

So the court made UCWA a party to the lawsuit at that point, and gave us some authority, called it—rather than give us out-and-out dispatch procedures, which we thought was necessary, the court gave us counseling and social services, that kind of stuff, to provide for the everyday needs of the workers and follow up on dispute settlements and stuff. But the problem was that the important thing the court gave us in that particular order was that in order for a worker to go into the trade union and an apprentice to go in, he must come to UCWA and be interviewed and recommended by UCWA. Then if he was fired from the job, before he went back for dispatch, he had to come back here [to UCWA] again, so we could deal with the question of whether his firing was racial discrimination, or whatever the case was. So that gave us some level of involvement in the control of that whole dispatch of the apprentices. It wasn't what we wanted, but it was probably as much as we thought we would get.

And had we done our job properly, it would have been sufficient. However, we didn't do our job properly. Guys would get laid off and they would go to the union hall and they'd dispatch them out again. The unions were clear on their ability to violate the order without being called on it. See, the court positioned itself in the middle and said that he would not be taking harsh actions against the trade unions in terms of calling them in contempt, nor would he—if we violated some injunction that he had imposed on us, but he was not willing to throw us in jail for violating those injunctions, so rather than antagonize either side, the court saw itself as trying to get all sides to sit down and discuss the disputes and stuff.

He [the judge] also set up what he called a Court Order Advisory Committee. A committee was set up originally and completely ignored us and our actions. The committee was set up, and members of the committee came from the state and from labor and management, and there was also some representatives from the “minority community.” The vehicle for appointment from the minority community was the Washington State Human Rights Commission. So rather than appoint some of us who were involved in it, the Black people from the Human Rights Commission and—I can't remember the guy's name now, but really bourgeois person.

[00:16:50] **WILLIAM:** Are you talking about Al Cowles?

[00:16:53] **TYREE:** Al Cowles. So Al Cowles appointed a Black real estate broker, Jerome Page from the Seattle Urban League.

[00:17:02] **WILLIAM:** What real estate guy?

[00:17:03] **TYREE:** His name was William Conley, Bill Conley. He's also involved with the CCA.

[00:17:08] **WILLIAM:** Is he akin to [?Bell Meyer's?] husband?

[00:17:17] **TYREE:** No. And so Conley—I mean, I don't think so. Conley and Page and—

[00:17:25] **WILLIAM:** Hubbard?

[00:17:26] **TYREE:** No, Walt Hubbard wasn't appointed to it. Oh, Jim Takisaki from the—one minority, none Black was also appointed, and that was Jim Takisaki. Let me see, who else... That was basically it.

So at that point, we had nothing to say about the order, even though we had been the major people involved in the lawsuit even coming in the first place. But in '72, we got official involvement in the act, and they also

appointed one representative from the UCWA to the Advisory Committee, and one additional minority community person, that we then had enough influence on the committee that UCWA got that also. So Harley Bird went as the representative from the minority community, and I went as UCWA's representative. I know that I didn't go, but eventually—I'm on there now, I think I replaced somebody from UCWA later. So we had involvement in the decision-making body of the court at that point.

[00:18:43] **WILLIAM:** Didn't the county have someone on it?

[00:18:45] **TYREE:** Yeah. When I said the state, I meant the state and the county also.

[00:18:49] **WILLIAM:** And the City?

[00:18:50] **TYREE:** No, not the City.

[00:18:50] **WILLIAM:** Just the county and state?

[00:18:51] **TYREE:** Yeah. The county had [Mervin] Parker, and the state sent Joe Toben.

[00:19:03] **WILLIAM:** That's really incredible. Can you believe I worked for both of those people?

[00:19:05] **TYREE:** Yeah. Parker wasn't a bad guy, Toben was the problem.

[00:19:08] **WILLIAM:** I know, I worked with Toben first and Parker later.

[00:19:11] **TYREE:** We finally got to the point where Toben—we finally had to deal with him. The trade unions had at that time Austin St. Laurent and a guy named Glen Arnold from the sheet metal union, it's A-R-N-O-L-D, and Austin St. Laurent from the Building Trades Council, it's S-T and then L-A-U-R-E-N-T.

[00:19:47] **WILLIAM:** I got it, thanks.

[00:19:51] **TYREE:** Let's see...And management had Donald Close, who was an electrical contractor, and Fred Lind, who was a general contractor. So we were able to—the Advisory Committee really was formed to talk out stuff, more than decision-making process, because we were able to muster a sufficient amount of votes on the Advisory Committee to make decisions, but there was disunity on there, and the court ignored that anyway. We recognized where on one hand, we had a very liberal and liberally concerned old judge who was trying to do what was best in terms of the minority people and so on, but on the other hand he always acted in the interests of management. I think it was unconscious on his part, but he came from a belief or a background, and so his responses were always basically in the best interest of management. I mean, he did some things that were not in their interests at some points, some things that were in labor's interest, but generally what he gave us was a classic statement in the order, where he says that these jobs, these additional jobs, shall be in addition to the existing jobs, not in lieu of.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

What that meant in essence was that he's putting in an additional hundred, hundred and twenty-five people a year into the building trades. So he's saying that management must create another 125 jobs a year so that this is not taking jobs from white workers. But he did not take in one step, nor has labor, nor has management, to

rectify that. In essence, the first year there was no more white apprentices taken in, and so those jobs for Black apprentices were in lieu of white workers' jobs.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

So that three years later, or four years later, when we finally got them into taking in the workers after we had gotten some control over it, there was maybe a hundred new Black apprentices in the program and no more white apprentices in none of those programs. So what that meant, in essence, was that those jobs were in fact in lieu of white workers' jobs. And so what we were doing was taking the work from white workers, who by the fact that they were not even in the industry, could not have been the perpetrators of the discrimination. So it was a blow against working class people, that white workers were then having to give up a piece of their power for Black workers, when in essence, the industry—I'm talking about management, the employers who'd been taking the profits over the years should have had to increase the amount of work, the amount of employees used. There should have been another way to equitably deal with the question, but management didn't lose anything. So the court, in being liberal and letting Blacks in, did, in effect, put the burden on the white working class to share in their power with the other Black workers.

Now I might be talking about something that is an inherent problem in the capitalist society, but in fact that is what happened. White workers gave up some of their jobs for Black workers. We didn't understand that. I'm not sure that we did anything at all about that, but we didn't understand that. But I think politically, that it's incorrect to take jobs from white workers, but at that time we were struggling to get some jobs, and the court, in its naiveté, acted in the interest of management. And that also played right into the hands of whatever forces it's the best interest to have workers fighting among themselves, cause you have the antagonism on the side of white workers against Black workers, and so the working class was fighting among themselves over a share of the power. So that's basically how to sum up where we were at at that point in time politically. However, we saw our basic role as getting Blacks into the building trades.

[00:24:54] **WILLIAM:** So let me clarify something. So at that point in time, you saw your goal as primarily getting Blacks into the construction trade? Primarily, which was a reform objective, by and large?

[00:25:07] **TYREE:** Yeah, right.

[00:25:08] **WILLIAM:** A reformed political objective. And since then you have changed or developed a higher level of consciousness and developed a new frame of reference, a new ideology, so to say?

[00:25:20] **TYREE:** Mhm. [affirmatively] But in the course of like our work and what we were doing, was like policing employers who were not meeting the journeymen apprenticeship ratio, and so we spent a lot of time going from job to job seeing how many journeymen were working and how many apprentices were working, because the court had then made mandatory the requirements that for every five journeymen, there must be one apprentice. And the apprentices by this time were all Black, so then we were getting Blacks on the job. And by doing that, the essence of that was that we kept Black workers working, and they stayed in the apprenticeship program, and now, five years later, started to graduate as journeymen. And there's probably twenty, twenty-five of them because, see, there was such a large attrition rate the first year of guys who were graduating. There was also a large amount of workers who, say, came to Seattle from the South, or from the Army, or from other parts of the country, who because of the order were able to work in the industry.